

2 Peter

Peter wrote this letter to remind his readers of the great salvation they have in Jesus Christ so that they would not be led astray by those who come into the church trying to entice them to follow a cleverly worded and alternate gospel that bears no fruit.

This epistle claims that the apostle Peter wrote it (2 Pet. 1:1) as well as a previous letter (2 Pet. 1:14), which may be 1 Peter or another letter that we no longer have. This is because the writings of the church fathers contain fewer references to the Petrine authorship of 2 Peter than to the authorship of any other New Testament book.

However, there is strong internal evidence that Peter wrote the book. This includes stylistic and vocabulary similarities to 1 Peter and Peter's sermons found in Acts. Also, the writer claimed to have witnessed Jesus' transfiguration (2 Pet 1:16-18).¹

We know very little about the audience to whom Peter is writing. They may be younger churches in the faith in Asia Minor due to the fact that they have been easily enticed to follow the false teachers back into their pagan practices. And they may be largely Gentile Christians since there is very little reference to the First Testament compared to 1 Peter and Jude, which is very similar to the argument made in this book.

Peter's reference to his imminent death (2 Pet. 1:13-15) suggests that the time of composition may have been just before Peter suffered martyrdom. The writings of church fathers place Peter's death at 67-68 AD in Rome.

Purpose

The purpose of the letter of 2 Peter is to counter the influence of false teachers in the Church who are teaching that there is no eschatological second coming of Christ and final judgment (2 Pet. 1:16a; 2:3b). They taught this doctrine with the desire to free people from the fear of divine judgment (2 Pet. 2:19a) and thus offer moral freedom. This freedom to do what they want is called antinomianism (Rom. 3:8; 6:1, 15; Gal. 5:13). They reject all moral authority even though they claim to be followers of Christ. Because of this doctrine, they also believed that they were free to indulge in sexual immorality and drunkenness (2 Pet. 2:2, 10a, 13-14, 18).² Most likely this theology was developed out of the pagan, Hellenistic thinking from which they came (2 Pet. 1:16a, 20-21a). They may have thought to free Christianity from its rigid moral ethics, which they viewed as embarrassing in their culture.

Some believe that these false teachers are Gnostics.³ But this is not likely since the false teachers have no sense of cosmic dualism between a good spiritual God of light and an evil god of the material realm. Even though they speak degradingly of angels who gave us the Law, there is no evidence that they see these angels as evil creators and lords of the material realm.

¹ See Douglas J. Moo. *2 Peter and Jude*, pp. 21-24.

² See Richard Bauckman. *Jude, 2 Peter*, p. 155.

³ Gnosticism is a first- to third-century religion that taught that the spiritual realm was the only true realm and that humans were fallen gods trapped in the material realm. The true God is an unknowable, spiritual god of light (the god of the Second Testament) who emanated many spiritual, angelic beings into the universe. Out of these beings came the demiurge (the god of the First Testament), an evil megalomaniac who created the material realm and trapped sparks of light from the spiritual God of light in human bodies in the material realm to be his slaves. Thus, the material realm is evil, and humans must escape their bodies and the material realm by obtaining secret esoteric knowledge and thereby rejoin the god-force of light.

Outline

- I. The Great Salvation of God (1:1-21)
 - A. The Believers' Salvation and Work of God (1:1-11)
 - B. Salvation Based on the Word of God (1:12-21)
- II. The False Teachers' Ungodly Lifestyle (2:1-22)
 - A. The False Teachers' Judgment (2:1-10a)
 - B. The Conduct of the False Teachers (2:10b-22)
- III. The False Teachers' Denial of Christ's Return (3:1-18)
 - A. The Certainty of Christ's Return (3:1-13)
 - B. The Exhortation to Godly Living (3:14-18)

I. The Great Salvation of God (1:1-21)

Peter begins his letter by reminding his readers that Christ's salvation was intended to free them from a life of enslaved immorality that leads to hopelessness. They are instead to live godly lives that reflect who Jesus Christ is and will lead to life and blessings. He reminds them that this gospel is based on the revealed word of God found in the First Testament and given to the apostle from Jesus Himself. He does this in contrast to the lifestyle and teaching of the false teachers who have come among them and whom he is going to refute in 2 Pet. 2-3.

A. The Believers' Salvation and the Work of God (1:1-11)

The first section (2 Pet. 1:3-4) establishes the basis for Christian living in what God and Christ have done for us. The second section (2 Pet. 1:5-10) urges the Christians to progress morally in the grace of Christ and the hope of the eschatological promises of God. The third section (2 Pet. 1:11) holds out the promises of entry into the eschatological kingdom of God for those whose faith produces a virtuous life.

1:1 Peter begins his letter by referring to himself as a slave and apostle of Jesus Christ. Many translations translate the Greek word *doulos* as "servant," but this word does not carry the idea of a free individual serving another. This word is used of one who is not free and who has been enslaved to another or has sold himself into slavery. Unlike in American history, there were many types of slavery, and not all were as bad as slavery was in America. Some people chose to become slaves in order to pay off debts. In fact, if one were a slave in a politically powerful family, like Caesar's, then the slave's status was actually higher than that of a free person. Jude sees Christ as the ultimate master of whom he is a slave, in that he has surrendered his will to Christ. Yet Christ is a good and loving master who bought Jude with His own life. And Jude's status in heaven as a slave to Christ is greater than his status as a free person in the world. This concept is also seen Rom. 1:1; Phil 1:1; James 1:1; Gal. 1:10; 2 Pet. 1:1; Col. 4:12; 2 Tim. 2:24; 1 Cor. 7:22; Eph. 6:6. Thus Jude sees his authority and calling to serve the Lord.

The word "righteousness" is not used to refer to the redemptive work of Christ on the cross but rather has more of an ethical quality communicating "fairness," which gives equal privileges to all Christians.⁴ The phrase "God and Savior" refers specifically to Jesus Christ and is one of the clearest statements in the Second Testament concerning the deity of Christ. It is through Jesus Christ's righteousness that we have been granted the means to have faith, which brings life, for it is His righteousness that has been imputed to us.

The phrase "a faith just as precious as ours" means that the Gentile has received a salvation that is just as valuable and equal to that which the Jews have received. Jesus' salvation is fully given to all, no matter one's ethnicity.

1:2 Because of the righteousness of God and salvation of Christ, we are able to experience grace and peace in abundant measure as it is lavished upon us by our good and loving Father. But experiencing this grace and peace comes in greater measure only as we grow in great depth and rich knowledge of who God and Jesus are. "The knowledge of God" refers to a personal knowledge of God, which is having a relationship with God that has strong practical and ethical implications; this will become clear in 2 Pet. 1:3-8.⁵

⁴ See Richard Bauckman. *Jude, 2 Peter*, p. 168.

⁵ See Richard Bauckman. *Jude, 2 Peter*, p. 170.

Peter begins his letter by reminding his readers of the great salvation they have through the grace of God to contrast how lacking is the offer of the false teachers in their midst.

1:3 Peter states that he can ask and pray for this for his readers because the divine power of God has already bestowed upon them all of this if they just reach out in a relationship to access it. God has already given them everything they need for life and godliness. The word “life,” translated as eternal life by some, should be understood as a hendiadys, referring to a “godly life.” Godliness refers to purity and respect for God, as well as the moral way of life that comes from knowing Him.⁶ This comes by God’s “glory and might,” which denotes the manifestation of His “divine power,” referring to his incarnate life, ministry, and resurrection. By His saving work, Christ not only gave us what was necessary to live a godly life now but also promises us a full life for the future to come. Peter exhorts his readers to moral effort so that they may be sure to grow in a knowledge of God and inherit His promises.

1:4 It is because of the glory and excellence of God that He has given us His promises fulfilled in Christ. The reason we were given these promises is so that we could escape the corruption of the world and partake of the divine nature of God. Although Peter has taken the expression “partakers of the divine nature” from paganism, his meaning is Christian. He does not mean that man will become God, as the pagans and mystery religions believe, but rather that believers have a direct connection to God where we truly can call Him our Father (2 Pet. 3:19). This phrase carries the same idea as Paul’s “in Christ” phrase.

It is through Christ that we have escaped the corruption of the world, which carries the idea of physical and moral corruption due to the effects of sin and not just to the material nature of the world (Eph. 4:22).⁷ Our escaping the world does not refer to our putting our sinful desires behind us but rather to escaping the judgment of Christ on the world that is yet to come.

1:5 Thus if God has bestowed upon us his great promises of a new life then we are to make every effort to live virtuous lives. Peter lists seven virtues that appear to be in random order. The word “excellence” could also be “moral excellence” and is the same verb used of “glory and excellence” in 2 Pet. 1:3.

“Knowledge” seems out of place in an ethical list, but it is a practical knowledge of wisdom rather than a speculative, esoteric knowledge that bears no connection to the earthly lives we live, as in the Greek way of understanding.⁸

1:6 “Self-control” is an abstinence from indulging in physical desires or excess (Prov. 16:32; 25:28; Acts 24:25; 1 Cor. 9:24-27; Gal. 5:23; Phil. 3:12-16; 1 Tim. 4:7-8; James 4:17). It is not a prohibition but rather a moderation. The context is a warning against misusing one’s Christian freedom, found in the abundant grace of God, to indulge in one’s desires (Gal. 5:23).

“Perseverance” is the ability to keep going in life despite trials and temptations because one’s trust is in God and the hope for the fulfillment of His promises (Rom. 5:3-4; 15:4-5; 2 Cor. 1:6; 6:4; Col. 1:11; 1 Thess. 1:3; 2 Thess. 1:4; James 1:3).

“Godliness” refers to the desire to please God by behaving in thought, word, and deed in a way that is reflective of His character.

⁶ See Richard Bauckman. *Jude, 2 Peter*, p. 178.

⁷ See Richard Bauckman. *Jude, 2 Peter*, p. 182.

⁸ See Richard Bauckman. *Jude, 2 Peter*, p. 186.

1:7 “Brotherly affection” is the intentional and thoughtful consideration of other believers (1 Pet. 1:22; 3:8; Rom. 12:10; 1 Cor. 12:25-26; 1 Thess. 4:9; Heb. 13:1). It is going out of one’s way in order to do something kind for another.

“Love” communicates the idea of unselfish love that actively seeks to better another’s life without desiring anything in return. It unites all the other virtues (1 Pet. 1:22; 3:8; Rom. 12:10; 1 Cor. 12:25-26; Col. 3:14; 1 Thess. 4:9; Heb. 13:1).

1:8 Peter makes it clear that we must continue to pursue and grow in these virtues. Failing to do so will render us useless and ineffective in the kingdom of God. The words “idle” and “unfruitful” communicate the idea that the Christian faith is supposed to have ethical effects in the Christian life.⁹ The pursuit of the knowledge of God is what we should desire rather than the knowledge of the world. It is only in the wisdom of God that we can mature and live out the virtues of the godly life (John 14:21).

2 Pet. 1:3-4 makes it clear that God is responsible for our salvation, but 2 Pet. 1:5-8 makes it clear that we are responsible for living up to our salvation. This is the mysterious and paradoxical tension of sanctification in the Bible, wherein each believer is responsible before God for his conduct and spiritual growth, yet that growth could not take place without God’s prior work and constant enabling.

1:9 In contrast, the one who lacks this desire to know God and reflect His virtues is blind and in the dark. Blindness is associated with the inability to see the truth (Matt. 15:14; 23:16, 24; Luke 6:39; John 9:40-41; 12:40; Rom. 2:19; 2 Cor. 4:14). They are not like the unbelievers who are blind to the truth of God, but rather they have forgotten that the purpose of their cleansing of sins was so that they could move toward the goal of being completely free from sin. The metaphor of cleansing from sin is a reference to purification at baptism (Acts 22:16; 1 Cor. 6:11; Eph. 5:26; Titus 3:5). There they received forgiveness and made a decisive break from their old sinful life in order to pursue the virtuous life of God. Now they have relapsed into a pre-conversion way of thinking and have become shortsighted in that they live only for the now in their Christian “freedom” and are not moving toward the future of being righteous and holy.

1:10 Peter then urges the believers to make every effort to pursue their calling in Christ so that they will not stumble into sin. This does not mean that moral progress provides assurance of one’s election but that the ethical fruits of faith are objectively necessary in order to obtain the completion of one’s final salvation. Likewise, this does not mean that you will never sin; rather, it refers to the disaster of not completing one’s final salvation (Jude 24).

1:11 Thus, this pursuit of God will lead to an entrance into the eternal kingdom of God. In light of 2 Pet. 3:13 and its context, the eternal kingdom is not about just getting to heaven but looks forward to the final resurrection into the righteous reign of God in the renewed heavens and earth.

⁹ See Richard Bauckman. *Jude, 2 Peter*, p. 188.

B. Salvation Based on the Word of God (1:12-21)

In this section, Peter establishes his credentials as one who received a greater revelation directly from Jesus Christ and God, which was verified by witnesses, in contrast to the false teachers who received unverified dreams from unknown spirits. In this way, Peter and the apostles are far more trustworthy when it comes to defining what the gospel is.

1:12 Even though the readers already know all these truths, Peter will continually remind his readers of them. The “truth” is a common reference to the gospel (Gal. 2:5, 14; 5:7; Eph. 1:13; Col. 1:5; 2 Thess. 2:12-13; 2 Tim. 2:15; James 1:18; 2 John 4). They need this reminder because as humans we always need to be reminded of the gospel and also because they are not living the truth in the way Peter expects, as they have allowed false teachers among themselves.

1:13-15 The word “tabernacle” or “tent” is a metaphor of the physical body and is used of Christ’s body (John 1:14; 2:21) and the believer’s body (1 Cor. 3:9, 16, 19; Eph. 2:21). Scripture can say this because the Shekinah glory of God (the Spirit of God) that dwelt in the tabernacle has now been transferred to the believer’s body and life (Acts 2:1-4). We do not know when or how Peter received a revelation from Jesus that he was going to die soon, but history shows that it was fulfilled as he was told. Neither do we know what exactly Peter wrote to his readers after this letter.

1:16 The opponents claimed that the apostles were following and teaching fable or fictional stories. The Greek Epicureans believed that the Greek stories of punishment in the afterlife were invented in order to control people morally through fear, therefore any story of judgment was considered a fable to these “enlightened” teachers. Unlike the false teachers, Peter’s credentials are that he was chosen by Jesus to live with Him and personally witnessed everything that Jesus taught and did. This is the same point that John made when refuting the Gnostics (1 John 1:1-4). So, if anyone were making something up, it would be the ones who were not eyewitnesses to Jesus and His ministry.

1:17-18 The revelation from God to which Peter refers is the transfiguration of Jesus when He received honor and glory from God (Matt. 17:1-1; Luke 9:28-36). Unlike the false teachers, Peter had a personal divine revelation while he was with Jesus and in the presence of two other witnesses, John and James. Jesus is not a Hellenistic “divine man,” as if the transfiguration revealed His hidden divine nature that all humans have, according to the Greek way of thought. Rather Peter views the transfiguration as the eschatological revelation of the true and unique nature of Jesus Christ. Jesus is invested with the divine glory because He has been tasked with carrying out God’s eschatological judgment and reign.¹⁰ By referring to the hill of Jesus’ transfiguration as the “holy mountain,” he is connecting the glory of God being revealed in Jesus to the glory and fire of God that came down on Mount Sinai after the exodus of Israel (Exodus 19). Yahweh who gave the Law is the same as Jesus who bears the divine glory of God and will bring judgment in the final days. This is what the false teachers deny and is the reason Peter refers to the event of the transfiguration.

1:19 The “prophetic word” refers to the revelation of the First Testament that points to the coming of Christ in the Second Testament. Christ’s transfiguration confirms the prophecies of the First Testament, which then testifies to the prophecy of the Second Coming. The “day” to

¹⁰ See Richard Bauckman. *Jude, 2 Peter*, pp. 217-218.

which Peter refers is a symbol for the eschatological age, which will come with the second coming of Jesus Christ.

The “morning star” is first an allusion to Num. 24:17 (Mal. 4:2; Rev. 2:28; 22:16), where the messiah is prophesied as a star that will come out of Israel, reign over the nations, and judge them for their rebellion against God’s kingdom. Second, it is an allusion to the ancient Near Eastern and Greek thought that Venus was the first light to rise in the sky each morning and became a symbol for the reigning power of emperors and kings. By using this phrase, Peter proclaims Christ as the ultimate emperor and judge over creation both in the Jewish and Greek worlds.

By placing the rising of the morning star (the second coming of Christ) in his reader’s hearts, a metaphor for the desire and volition of humans, rather than in the sky, Peter is pointing them to Christ as the internal guidance to truth (illumination) in their present lives and to the First Testament prophecy of His return—toward which they are being directed and are looking. Christ as the morning star in their hearts (1 Cor. 13:8-12) allows them to enter into the eschatological kingdom of God.

1:20-21 The translation here is difficult and should be understood as “prophets’ own interpretation” (NIV; NET) not “one’s own interpretation” (ESV). The “prophets’” interpretation fits the context better as Peter just referred to the First Testament prophecies of Christ (1 Pet. 1:19). It also forms an *inclusio* (bracket) with 1 Pet. 1:16 that the apostles should not follow fables or the imagination of the prophets (1 Pet. 1:20). The true prophet does not speak on his own initiative (Jer. 14:13; 20:9; 23:16; 18:21-22, 26; Ezk. 13:3; Amos 3:8). The prophecies of the First Testament are far too grand to be the imagination of the prophets, and also they validated their prophecies with signs and miracles. The evidence is overwhelming that they were led by the Holy Spirit. On the contrary, the false teachers have no evidence for what they say except for their own word.

II. The False Teachers' Ungodly Lifestyle (2:1-22)

There is a close relationship between Jude 4-13 and 2 Peter 2:1-18. Peter draws heavily from Jude here in order to condemn the false teachers. Peter transitions from his defense against the accusations the false teachers have made against him to an attack against the false prophets with his own charges. His charges against the false teachers is their denial of the moral law of God and their unrighteous lifestyle that is leading the Christian community astray.

A. The False Teachers' Judgment (2:1-10a)

In this section, Peter focuses more on the judgment that is in store for the false teachers because of their blatant denial of God's moral laws. Peter's discussion of prophets in 2 Pet. 2:1a creates a smooth transition from his discussion of First Testament prophecy (2 Pet. 20-21) to the predictions of the false prophets (2 Pet. 2:1b-3a).

There is a chiasmic structure that ties the previous and this section together:

A Apostles (2 Pet. 1:16-18)

B First Testament prophets (2 Pet. 1:19-21)

B First Testament false prophets (2 Pet. 2:1a)

A False teachers (2 Pet. 2:1b-3)

2:1 Peter makes it clear that there have always been and will always be false teachers among the believers. The "false prophets" refers to the First Testament false prophets (Luke 6:26). It also refers to the false prophets of the last times (Matt. 24:11, 24; Mark 13:22; 1 John 4:1; Rev. 16:13; 19:20; 20:10). They do not come from outside of the church but rather have brought their ideas from the outside. Peter does not specifically deny them as Christians but rather sees them as apostate Christians who have disowned their Master (which is taken from Jude 4). As a result of denying Christ, who is the only one who has freed them from the final judgment, now they will face the final judgment without the atoning blood of Christ.

2:2 One result of the false teachers' influence on the people is that they will lead many astray into their "debauched" lifestyle, which refers to sensual indulgence, especially sexual immorality. Second, others outside of Christianity will look at them and slander (Isa. 52:5) Christianity as being no different from the rest of the world, even though the gospel preaches a higher path. Peter's exhortation to Christians is to not cause offense to pagans by their immoral living (Rom. 14:16; 1 Tim. 6:1; Titus 2:5).

2:3 Because of their false greed, they do not serve the body of Christ to edify and build it up, but rather they use clever words to deceive and gain power over others. This is not the character or mission of Jesus Christ. Thus, the condemnation of the false teachers was pronounced long ago. "Long ago" means that the judgments of the First Testament on ungodly people, which Peter will talk about in 2 Pet. 2:4-10a, serve as examples to the false teachers that God will judge them as well. The First Testament judgments were prototypes of the eschatological judgment that is to come. The world has been waiting such a long time for the second coming Christ, it may feel like it will not come, but it is not idly sleeping (Ps. 44:23; 120:4); rather, it will come swiftly upon them (1 Pet. 2:1).

2:4 In 2 Pet. 2:4-10a Peter gives three examples from the First Testament where God drastically judged those who seized autonomy and rebelled against the Law of God to do their own thing. Just as they were judged by God, so will the false teachers of today (2 Pet. 2:3). Rather than specifying the sins of these examples, Peter will sum up their sins in the words of 2 Pet. 2:10a, which gives a strong emphasis to sexual indulgences as the main sin that they all have in common. Thus this becomes an indictment against the sexual immorality of the false teachers that they have excused in light of the grace of God for sins. 2 Pet. 2:4, 6, 10a are dependent on Jude 6-8, which makes the same point, with the flood and Sodom and Gomorrah, that Peter is making here.

The first example is angels who sinned against God by sleeping with the “daughters of men” in Gen. 6:1-6 and were thrown into the abyss as a result (Jude 6). The word “hell” that is seen in most translations should be understood as Tartarus, which was almost always used of the Titans who were thrown into Tartarus in the Greek myths. (Josephus, *Antiquities*. 1:73; Ezek. 32:27; Sir. 16:7). The Titans were the second generation of gods descending from the primordial gods of earth and sky. They were demonic gods of great strength, overthrown by their children, the Olympian deities, and thrown into the abyss, Tartarus. By using the Greek word Tartarus, Peter is connecting the demonic nature of the Titans, with which his Greek audience would be familiar, with the demonic angels of Gen. 6:1-6.

Genesis 6:2 refers to these angels as the Sons of God, which is a title in the Bible that refers only to angels—*bene elim* (1 Sam. 2:12; 25:17, 25; Ps. 29:1; 89:6; 103:20) and *bene elohim* (Deut. 14:1; Job 1:6; 2:1; 38:7; Hos. 1:10; 11:1). 2 Pet. 2:4-5, which refers to the same judgment as Jude 6, states that these angels were thrown into the abyss during the time of Noah (1 Pet. 3:19-20; 2 Pet. 2:4; perhaps 1 Cor. 11:10; 1 Tim. 2:9). And Jude 6-7 states that they were thrown into the abyss for the same sexual immorality that Sodom and Gomorrah committed.

The Sons of God was universally understood in Judaism as angels until the mid-second century AD (1 Enoch 6-19; 21; 86-88; 106:13-15; Jub. 4:15, 22; 5:1). In Christianity, this understanding was not questioned until the late third century and disappeared in the fifth century. 1 Enoch 6-7, an extra-biblical text written between the First and Second Testaments, specifically calls these fallen angels the Watchers and details their taking of the “daughters of men” from Gen. 6:1-4. The fact that Jude alludes to 1 Enoch many times in his letter (which will be discussed in the following pages) and that he specifically quotes 1 Enoch 1:9 in Jude 14 shows that Jude has this understanding of the Sons of God in mind.

The angels have been judged for two sins. First, they disobeyed God and “abandoned their proper home” (Jude 6; 1 Enoch 12:4; 15:3). The second is their violation of God’s moral law with their sexual immorality (2 Pet. 2:10; Jude 7). The point is that they rebelled against God’s law, and He condemned them for it.

2:5 The second example is the flood destroying and cleansing the earth as a result of the activity of the Watchers with the human women (3 Macc. 2:4). God did not spare those who were thinking only evil all the time (Gen. 6:5); He saved only Noah, who found favor with God. God used Noah to preach righteousness, which means that Noah exhorted the people of his day towards righteous living. Here, the flood is a prototype of the eschatological judgment of God (Matt. 24:37-39).

2:6 The third example is the destruction of Sodom and Gomorrah by fire for their lack of hospitality and for their sexual immorality (Gen. 19). The flood and the destruction of Sodom

and Gomorrah were sometimes linked together as two single examples of divine judgment (Luke 17:26-30; 2 Pet. 3:5-7). In Jewish tradition, the sin of Sodom and Gomorrah is rarely seen as homosexual sin but as a violation of hospitality (Wis. 19:14-15; Josephus, Ant. 1:194), as selfishness (Gen. 13:13; 18:20; Ezek. 16:49-50; 3 Macc. 2:5), or as sexual immorality in general (Jub. 16:5-6; 20:5; T. Levi 14:6; T. Benj. 9:1). Sodom and Gomorrah were not destroyed for the sin of homosexuality. Rather, their destruction was because they wanted to demonstrate their dominance over the angels by raping and humiliating them. This is a gross and violent opposite to hospitality and loving your neighbor. What made this sin truly evil is that the whole city called this sin good (Gen. 19:4-5).

2:7-10a Peter makes the argument that if God rescued Lot, a righteous man, from the evil and from the resulting judgment of God, then how much more will He rescue you as righteous believers who resist the evil of the false teachers? 2 Pet. 2:8 is a parenthetical statement between 2 Pet. 2:7 and 2:9 that describes how Lot demonstrated his righteousness by the fact that he lived in the city and was tormented day after day by what he saw. This is seen in the fact that he invites the angels into his home and tries to defend them against the men of the town (Gen. 19:2, 6-8). Noah and Lot are typical of the situation of Christians who will be delivered from the condemnation of God in the final evil days before the second coming of Christ. It must be made clear that Peter is assuring the believers that Noah and Lot are an example of the fact that they will be spared the final judgment (Matt. 13:30). It is not saying that believers never die in all earthly judgments of God, for this was not true of the faithful Israelites when the Assyrians and the Babylonians took them into exile.

2 Pet. 2:10a seems to echo two phrases in Jude: “went after strange flesh” (Jude 7) and “defile the flesh” (Jude 8). Jude implies they follow the flesh as a god or master. 2 Pet. 2:10a has a more neutral sense, wherein the sensuality becomes evil when it is allowed to dominate.¹¹ Those who subject themselves to the flesh cannot be subject to the Lord. Thus 2 Pet. 2:10a specifies the same two sins as 2 Pet. 2:1-2.

¹¹ See Richard Bauckman. *Jude, 2 Peter*, p. 255.

B. The Conduct of the False Teachers (2:10b-22)

After condemning the false teachers for their blatant rebellion against God, Peter now details their unrighteous behavior and how they are a blemish on the Christian community for their sexual immorality. 2 Pet. 2:10b-22 draws on Jude 8-12. While Peter omits the specific story of Michael disputing with the devil, he still makes the point from the story in 2 Pet. 2:10b-11. He also omits the references to Cain and Korah to focus more on Balaam's sin.

2:10b-11 It is very difficult to figure out who are the “glorious ones” and who are the “angels” and what is being contrasted. The “glorious ones” refers to angelic authorities and not human authorities since the latter does not make any sense in the context. The question is, who are—holy angels or demons? If the “glorious ones” (2:10) are good angels, then the false teachers are insulting the good angels, which is contrasted with the behavior of good “angels” (2:11), who do not even insult the false teachers, even though the false teachers insult them.

If the “glorious ones” (2:10) are evil angels, then the false teachers are accused of insulting the demons, which not even the good “angels” (2:11) do. Most commentators agree that this seems to be the correct understanding of Jude 8, that they are good angels. Though in Jude 8 the “glorious ones” are good angels, for Peter they are the demons. Peter is following the thinking of Jude 6, that even holy angels, who are more powerful than the false teachers, do not insult the demons, as seen in the example of Michael not insulting the devil. Most likely, the false teachers in their immorality had contempt for the power of the demons. When they were rebuked for their immoral behavior and warned of the danger of falling into the power of the devil and sharing his condemnation, they laughed at the idea, denying that the devil could ever have any power over them.¹²

2:12-13a Peter compares the false teachers to animals in that they are not rational and merely follow their desires. The ancient world believed that certain animals were born to be slaughtered and eaten. Thus, the false teachers are like animals in their irrationality and in that they were destined for destruction. Because they have no respect for anyone and show no love for their neighbor, like the men of Sodom and Gomorrah, they too will be destroyed.

2:13b-14 These false teachers are a blemish on the church, for they turn the Lord's feast (communion) into a time where their eyes are always looking for a woman with whom to commit adultery. Communion is all about Christ dying to cleanse the church of her adultery against Him, yet these false teachers use this time to pursue further adultery. This shows their true heart and how evil it is. Not only do they do this, but they entice others into the same path.

2:15-16 Jude compares the false teachers with the greedy Balaam, who went against the direct command of God and was willing to destroy the chosen people of God because of his love of money (Num. 22:18; 24:13; 31:16; Deut. 23:4; Neh. 13:2; Rev. 2:12). Balaam was a prophet hired by Balak king of Moab to curse Israel. However, God would not allow him and instead caused him to bless Israel. Rather than heeding the sovereignty of God and following Him, Balaam told Balak to seduce Israel sexually with the temple prostitutes of Moab. He did this so that he could still get paid. Eventually he was killed in battle as a judgment from God (Num. 31:8; Josh. 13:21-22).

Peter states that Balaam's choices were swayed by his greed so that he actually thought he could succeed in his plan of opposing God's will. In contrast, even his dumb donkey knew better than

¹² See Richard Bauckman. *Jude, 2 Peter*, pp. 261-262.

to oppose the will of God. In the same way, the false teachers, who deny the reality of God's judgment, foolishly think they can sin without consequences.

2:17 2 Pet. 17-18 draws inspiration from Jude 12-13, 16. The false teachers do not bring the water of life; rather, they are springs that are dried up and bring only death. Instead of the damp morning mist that refreshes the countryside, they are the haze that heralds dry weather. Thus, the same abyss that the fallen angels are in (2 Pet. 2:4; Jude 6) is also reserved for them because what they do is in alignment with the demons.

2:18 The reason they will go into the abyss is that they use what sounds like brilliant theology but is really twisted and empty, enticing believers who just escaped the desires of the world to return back to sexual immorality. This indicates that these new converts have not completely broken free from the influences of the pagan society of the Greco-Roman world and are easily capable of slipping back into their former pagan lifestyles.

2:19 The irony is that although the false teachers promise freedom, they themselves are enslaved to immorality (Rom. 6). They do not themselves have the freedom that they promise to give; they promise freedom from the moral law and freedom from the judgment of the second coming of Jesus Christ. The author is turning back on them the charge of unfulfilled prophecy. They complain that the "promise" of the second coming of Jesus Christ is unfulfilled (2 Pet. 3:4, 9), but they themselves are guilty of making unfulfilled prophecy.

The text "for whatever a person succumbs to, to that he is enslaved" was derived from the practice of enslaving enemies overpowered in battle.¹³ They think they are free to do what they want, but the truth is that the immorality has control over them, and they have to commit sins in order to feed their addiction (Rom. 6:12-19; Titus 3:3). Those sins and addictions will eventually destroy them (Rom. 2).

2:20 Peter is not saying that the false teachers were saved, rather that they had heard and understood the gospel and responded to it. They had everything they needed to escape defilement. Yet they chose to go back to the defilement of the world rather than fully receive the redemption of the gospel message. They never received the Holy Spirit, so they never changed. The last part of this verse is identical to the words in Matt. 12:45 and Luke 11:26, when Jesus said that if someone does not receive the Holy Spirit after having demons cast out of him, then seven more will enter him and his second state is worse than the first. The false teachers are now worse off after hearing the gospel and then rejecting it.

2:21 Now that they know "the way of the righteous" (Job 24:13; Prov. 21:16, 21; Matt. 21:32) and have rejected it, their judgment will be far greater than if they had never heard the gospel. They are now responsible for the knowledge that they gained and what they have chosen to do with it. The "holy commandment" is used in the same way as the above—a description of Christianity considered as a body of ethical teaching (Rom. 7:12; 1 Tim. 6:14).

2:22 Their behavior fully illustrates the proverb in Prov. 26:11. Peter sees them as unclean dogs and pigs, which the Jews saw as symbols of the immorality of the Gentile life (Rev. 22:15). They have become a sad image of a wasted effort of offering them redemption.

¹³ See Richard Bauckman. *Jude, 2 Peter*, p. 277.

III. The False Teachers' Denial of Christ's Return (3:1-18)

Peter moves from a negative refuting of and warning against false teachers to a more positive focus on the second coming of Jesus Christ, which the false teachers had been denying. Peter ends his letter with encouragement for his readers to live godly lives and look forward to a better day that is only possible through Jesus Christ's second coming.

A. The Certainty of Christ's Return (3:1-13)

Peter wants to encourage his readers to find their hope and motivation for the present in the new heavens and earth that Christ will bring in His second coming.

3:1-2 There is a close relationship between Jude 16-18 and 2 Peter 3:1-3. The idea in 2 Pet. 3:1-2 echoes 2 Pet. 1:12-15. The first letter that Peter wrote is most likely 1 Peter, but it may refer to another letter that we no longer have. The holy prophets are the First Testament prophets. Peter put the teaching of the apostles, which came from Jesus Christ, on an equal level of authority with the writings of the First Testament prophets (2 Pet. 1:12-21; 3:16; Acts 1:16; Rom. 9:29; Heb. 4:7). The commandment was first Christ's and later the apostles' who preached it to the readers.

3:3-4 The idea in 2 Pet. 3:2-3 borrows from Jude 17-18. Peter warns his readers that all sorts of people will come and say all sorts of things in order to promote their own desires rather than the will of God or to benefit the community of believers. These false teachers mock the delayed coming and judgment of God (Ezek. 12:22; Amos 9:10; Mal. 2:17; Zeph. 1:12) and their predictions of the divine judgments on them (Isa. 5:18-20; Jer. 5:12-24; Amos 9:10). Nothing has changed; therefore, the prophets were wrong.

Almost all commentators understand "the fathers" or "our ancestors" as referring to the first Christian generation who embraced Jesus Christ as God's Son. This is why, according to the false teachers, the apostles should not be trusted, because Christ's predictions told through them have not come to fulfillment (Matt. 10:23; Matt. 16:28 [Mark 9:1; Luke 9:27]; Matt. 24:34 [Mark 13:30; Luke 21:32; John 21:22-23]).

3:5-6 The false teachers deliberately forget what every Jew understands about the creation of the world and the flood. These two events show that things have not always been as they are and can, therefore, change again. The first event was when God spoke the sky and the land into existence (Gen. 1:1; Heb. 11:3). The land emerged out of the primeval waters (Gen. 1:2, 6-7, 9; Ps. 33:7; 136:6-7; 148:5; Prov. 8:27-29), allowing human life to exist and dwell in the land. The world exists because the waters of chaos are held back and can no longer engulf the world.

The second event was when God allowed those same chaotic waters to cover the earth again in order to wipe out all life except for the righteous.

3:7 By the same word that created the world and destroyed it in Genesis, God will judge the world again but with fire. Thus, these events serve as a model of the fact that God brought life to the believers through Jesus Christ, and He will also bring His judgment for how one responds to Jesus Christ. Just as God has changed the state of His creation in the past, so He will also change the state of His creation in the second coming in order to judge the world.

3:8-9 Peter makes an allusion to Ps. 90:4 in order to make the point that time for God is not the same as time is for us. The point is not that time is meaningless to God or that God is timeless. The point is that God operates on a different schedule than we do and that the passing of time for

God is nowhere the same as it is for us. If God wants to extend the time limit for the second coming, then He can. And this is a good thing because it gives more time for repentance. God does not want people to perish but to repent (Ezk. 18:23, 32; 33:11; 1 Tim. 2:4).

The “forbearance” of God is connected to the idea of God being slow to anger (Ex. 34:6; Num. 14:18; Neh. 9:17; Ps. 86:15; 103:8; 145:8; Joel 2:13; Jonah 4:2). The “longsuffering” was associated with the opportunity to repent (Joel 2:12-12; Jonah 4:2; 3:10; Rom. 2:4).

3:10 The “day of the Lord” refers to the second coming of Jesus Christ in order to bring judgment on the earth for all sins. This day will, like a thief (Matt. 24:43 [Luke 12:39]), come suddenly and without warning and catch everyone by surprise. The judgment of the universe in 2 Pet. 3:10, 12 is more than a combined quotation from Mal. 3:19 and Isa. 34:4. On this day of judgment, every motivation and sin in the heavens and earth will be exposed before God and judged. The idea of the heavens melting away in a fire has less to do with them literally burning up and more to do with the idea of fire as a symbol of judgment.

3:11-13 Since everything will be judged and all worldly things be done away with, the question is, what kind of person should the believer be and what should he or she be living for? Peter believed that an understanding of the future should motivate the believer to live a holy life now, to have a godly character that reflects God’s character (2 Pet. 1:3, 6-7; 2:7, 10, 12-15, 18-20; 3:3; 1 Pet. 1:15-16).

The point is not that we look forward to the destruction and judgment of the world; rather, we look forward to the new age without sin where we will be with God, an age that God is going to bring in the second coming of Jesus Christ. The hope for new heaven and earth is based on Isa. 65:17; 66:22 (Matt. 19:28; Rom. 8:21; Rev. 21:1). The point is also not that the earth is going to be destroyed but that there will be a radical discontinuity between the old sinful order and the new redeemed order. It is clear that the Bible intended an understanding of renewal and not an abolition of creation (1 Enoch 54:4-5; Rom. 8:21). We are looking forward to the day that righteousness will be the true essence of creation (Isa. 9:7; 11:4-5; Rom. 14:17).

B. The Exhortation to Godly Living (3:14-18)

Peter ends his letter with a warning to the believers to not be led astray but rather to study and meditate on the Scriptures so that they can know God and live according to His will.

3:14 In light of the coming new righteous age, the believers are to pursue godly things and live in a way that is worthy of the righteous age of which they will be a part. They are to be at peace with God and to live spotless lives. Peace is the well-being that results from knowing and experiencing the mercy of God. “Spotless” means without defect or defilement (2 Pet. 2:13; 1 Pet. 1:19), and “blameless” means without justifiable cause for reproach. This is contrasted with the false teachers, who were stains and blemishes (2 Pet. 2:13) in the church.

3:15-16 The believer is to view the delay of the second coming of Christ as a demonstration of the longsuffering of God, who wants as many as possible to repent, rather than a sign that He is never coming.

Peter acknowledges that many of the things in Paul’s letters and all of Scripture can be very difficult to understand and require much effort. Thus, the warning is to not follow people who take advantage of this difficult task, twisting Scripture into what they want it to mean. Those who twist the Scriptures will fall into a destruction of their lives.

3:17 Therefore, now that the believers have been warned with ample evidence of the false nature of the teachers among them, they should be on their guard and not allow themselves to be led astray by doctrine that is not in Scripture.

3:18 In contrast to the false teachings, they are to grow in the grace and knowledge of Jesus Christ as our Lord and Savior. Our focus should be on Christ as revealed in Scripture, not on some teacher’s own questionable teachings. It is Christ and only Christ who deserves and receives honor both now and for all eternity to come.

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